

**Montana VR Council  
Meeting Minutes  
November 14-15, 2005**

# **Vocational Rehabilitation Council**

## **November 14-15, 2005**

### **Wilderness Room Helena, MT**

**Members present:** David Boyd, Dan Burke, Jackie Colombe (Tuesday only), Denise Corrao, Jim Daily, Faith Dawson, Don Jones, Carol Lambert, Sharla LaFountain, Dan Miles, Ron Mills, Paul Pearson, Ruth Straley, Dick Trerise, Claudette Vance, Michelle Williamson

**Members absent:** Dennis Moore, Dalayna Faught, Kermit Horn, Dennis Moore, Wayne Nankivel

**Staff and guests present:** Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Barbara Varnum, Mike Hermanson, Beverly Berg, Beki Brandborg

The meeting on November 14 consisted of an orientation of members, and the meeting on November 15 was the annual planning meeting.

Orientation consisted of going through the new VR Council notebook, reviewing the current committees, viewing videos on the history of VR, the Rehabilitation Act, principles and policies, and the role of state rehabilitation councils. We also heard what a rehab counselor does day to day, what some of the central office staff do, and what some of the current issues in VR are.

Notes from the annual planning meeting are attached.

# Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council

## Annual Planning Meeting

### November 14, 2005

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#### **Our 2006 meeting plans**

January 24-25	
April 27-28	(SILC meeting is April 19-20)
July 27-28	(Proposal is to meet at Fort Belknap)
October 5-6	(Annual planning meeting)

#### **January meeting agenda suggestions** (Not in order)

1. Begin the meeting by reviewing the Council's mission statement and vision statements.
1. Transportation Committee update
2. Show Denise's video and decide how best to utilize it.
3. Review the Report to the Governor.
4. Review Stats at a Glance document.
5. Jackie's report about going to Australia.
6. Review the draft vision statements Beki gave us and improve upon them.
7. Michelle training on the proper etiquette of dealing with people with disabilities.
8. Elect a vice chair of the Council.

The Chairs of each committee (Ruth, Don, David), with the Chair and Vice Chair will constitute our Executive Committee and meet with Peggy to develop our meeting agendas.

## **A review of our recent accomplishments:**

Or all the things we helped accomplish, what are we proud of? What have we done that is noteworthy and important?

- People who worked with the Legislature to get additional money for the VR Program.
- We got transportation legislation out of the Public Service Commission and into the Department of Transportation, making it possible for buses to cross county lines. Carol sponsored it. It removed barriers for people with disabilities. It changed the direction so we can do more for people with disabilities.
- Our Public Relations Committee did a great job with a TV public service commission, radio ad, and letters to the editor.
- A goal for the Council last year was for the Program to fully match the federal dollars and we succeeded! Several members of the Council testified at the Legislature to help this happen.
- The staff received cultural training.
- The Division exceeded all six of the performance standards. Outstanding!
- We have a feeling of accomplishment about improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.
- The consumer satisfaction survey results, particularly those utilizing the CAP services, were very positive.
- The Transitions Committee is helping grow the relationship between VR and the public school through the database of special education teachers and connections made with VR counselors.
- They make-up of the Council itself is very good. As a whole, we re very committed to what we do, giving us a level of credibility.
- We are a pro-active Board.
- We picked up another 121 on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.
- We visited five 121s on Reservations.
- The VR staff attended the Native American Brain Injury Conference, and Joe attended the National Conference of the 121 Tribal VR Programs.
- We filled our Native American slot on the Council.

What did we hear yesterday, during our orientation, that is a success or heading in the right direction and makes us proud to be associated with the VR Council and Program?

- Overwhelmed!
- Paul's dating history.
- The state met all the six criteria – most impressive!
- The Program isn't static, and never has been.
- The Council is a partner and part of a very good democratic process.
- Chris Clasby tackles the issue of when a person begins work, they lose benefits. The battle has just begun, but it is very important.
- The staff believes in the Program. A retiree in Florida called Joe and told Joe about how he received services 40 years ago in Butte from one of our counselors who encouraged him to go to Tech. That experience set his life on a good course (from what had been not

so positive) and he attributes his career success to the VR Program launching him in the right direction. Several days later a check arrived at VR for \$5,000 from the Florida gentleman. He came to Montana, attended our all staff meeting and told us he will never forget his appreciation to us from 40 years ago.

- The great compassion for our constituents by our counselors and staff is impressive.
- All the success stories out there speak volumes about the value we are adding to people's lives.

## **The VR Council**

### **The Vocational Rehabilitation Council Mission Statement**

*Mission statements describe what we do and provide that no other organization does and provides, what we are all about, the purpose of the organization and why it exists.*

The current mission statement is....

The purpose of the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council is to advise the Vocational Rehabilitation Program concerning policy and program issues, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers.

Revisions to be contemplated and finalized at our next meeting ....

The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council advises and works with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to improve policies, programs, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers and employers.

### **Vision for the Future**

*Vision statements are a number of statements that describe the changes we want to make in the lives of the people we serve, the differences in Montana we want to be responsible for, the ideal outcomes of our collective work and efforts. They are intended to be a reach, difficult to accomplish, and presented and worded as if they are already in place.*

### **Small group brainstorm:**

#### **Group 1's ideas:**

- To meet federal criteria for the next five years.
- To increase hourly wage at placements.
- To provide extended health care coverage as necessary to employed consumers. Do away with the problem of losing benefits when you become employed.
- To improve public awareness of our program services among employees at hospitals, schools and Job Service. Insure that consumers have immediate awareness – from these service providers – upon facing a new disability.
- Continued effort to include the Crow Tribe as a Section 121.
- To increase employer awareness about Vocational Rehabilitation clients as potential employees.
- To provide and develop some promotional materials for employers.

- To continue to produce tax payers.
- Continued cooperation and association with other public and private employment and training programs.
- To reach more people in communities in rural areas. The feeling of being the red headed step child is gone.
- To continue to secure state matching funds.

#### Group 2's ideas:

- Maintain full federal matching funds.
- Avoidance of order of selection with maintaining the integrity of the Program.
- Consistent improvement in consumers satisfaction.
- Strengthen and expand connections with business community to improve employment opportunities for consumers.
- Develop innovative marketing strategies.
- Streamline VR process to improve the client / counselor relationship. The VR counselor has many responsibilities and the power in the client / counselor relationship. The consumer feels they don't have many choices. Focus more on their interaction to help the consumer feel educated and empowered, and make better informed choices. Foster mutual trust, good working relationships, and teach them that it's okay to disagree, all leading to better outcomes for the consumer.
- Strengthen the partnership between the client and counselor.
- 100% of VR consumers are aware of the Client Assistance Program (CAP).
- Be known for a state-of-the-art Transition Program.
- Assure that the informed choices of clients are truly informed choices. Insure they are fully aware of the choices and benefits of each choice.

#### Group 3's ideas:

- Would like to see a VR Council member on the State Transportation Committee.
- Continue the good counseling services.
- Increase long-range employment outcomes, versus the job-hopping that many clients experience.
- Put VR Counselors into the high schools and Workforce Centers.
- Continue and expand public awareness with our legislators.
- Employer education.
- In five years, seeing people with significant disabilities in the community – work places, at recreation, etc. – is common place. There is full integration.
- Formal minutes of our meetings are a norm.

#### Group 4's ideas:

- The gaps in services for consumers are closed. Example: Currently books are covered, but not software.
- As inflation affects the cost of things our consumers use, adjustments are made.
- Continued good flexibility in the budget, such as for gas money.

- Counselors understand the value of technology to our consumers.
- We use creativity with budget dollars for the benefit of our consumers.
- The order of selection should remain the last option, and hopefully not be an option. The dollars must be kept up showing success statistics to legislators and the Governor.
- If federal dollars are reduced, increase the state funding to continue the programs that are already in place.
- Fill the position for the Blind and Low Vision technician.
- Educate consumers on disabilities. Example: Provide a WROC presenter to teach options in technology for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Educate counselors on individual disabilities:
  - Technology .... job options ... informed decisions for clients.
  - Use all-staff meetings to do this.
  - Provide a list of contacts for experts on each kind of disability. Counselors can act as the liaison between the consumer and the specialist.
- Feedback sheets. Consumers need to be able to report individuals as well as overall program.
  - Look at the form; Is it currently accurately reflecting what we want to know?
  - One suggestion: Anonymity without repercussions.
- Continue public relations efforts.

What are the common themes among our ideas for the future?

- Keep the money coming, funding concerns.
- Informed choice.
- Public awareness.
- Improve education with consumers, counselors, employers and the general public.
- The importance of the CAP program, and building awareness of it.

## Second draft VR Council Vision Statements

1. The federal criteria for funding is met each year. State matching funds are provided each biennium.
2. The hourly wage paid to VR placements is deemed to be a fair wage by the workers.
3. The order of selection is a thing of the past.
4. Consumer satisfaction with the VR program grows each year – and all VR clients are aware of and accessing the Client Assistance Program.
5. The Transition program and services are considered state-of-the art, and the best possible. Many people do what the Florida gentleman did, and call us with stories about their life-long success that they attribute to a great experience with VR services.
6. Services for VR consumers are exactly what they need to be. If clients need software, that is what they receive. As inflation affects the costs of services, the services – such as gasoline allotments – are adjusted upwards.
7. Counselors are well versed in individual disabilities, technology and career choices. They are consistently known for their great compassion for our constituents.
8. The consumer/counselor relationship is based on trust and empowerment. All choices are provided to the client, with the education necessary for the choices the consumer makes to be truly theirs.
9. The issue of losing benefits when you become employed is no longer the case.
10. Public awareness of VR issues and the availability of trained people with disabilities is well known.
11. All Montana Tribes have active and successful 121 programs, and do a good job of supporting each other across the state.
12. People with disabilities are fully integrated into our society and seeing people with significant disabilities in our community is common place. They are welcomed everywhere.
13. Employers are well aware of the opportunity to hire VR clients. Our connections to the business community is strong and there are more employment opportunities than we need. Our VR clients experience long-term work commitments.
14. Schools, doctors' offices, physical therapists, hospitals, Job Service, and other likely sites all actively help spread the word about the availability of VR services and provide people with our brochures. They even recommend our services and can speak to the success of people who have utilized them.
15. Rural Montana has the VR services they need and want.

## **The role and job description of the VR Council members**

A brainstorm:

- Meet with staff four times a year.
- Give staff an outside view on the policy directions, the perspective from the real world, a sounding board.
- Staff educates the Council on federal and state issues, and their impacts on Montanans.
- Staff names to us the potential areas of weakness and together we look for quality improvements.
- The Council helps the staff avoid tunnel vision.
- The Council members are ambassadors for the VR Program. We are people who can tell friends and co-workers about the Program. We are walking, talking billboards for VR; we support the process between clients and counselors.
- We advise and advocate for the VR Program.
- We use word of mouth to build awareness to consumers.
- Through our Committees, we initiate methods to enhance public awareness, thus saving the Program money.
- Each Council member can do one thing between meetings, a physical act to advance the VR cause, something that will help the Program, and then come to the next meeting and tell each other what we've done.
- Educate the public, including employers.
- Remove obstacles to help VR function well.
- Understand the role of counselors, and impact their work. Help educate consumers about the work of the counselors.
- Reach potential consumers so they know the value and opportunity VR represents.
- Be the consumers' advocate, for both VR and other services they might need. Help make the system seamless for them. Encourage the one-stop shop approach for them. Reach out to other boards and kinds of consumers to partner.
- Share how we personally broke down barriers.
- Reach out to give VR our perspectives and viewpoints on what can be improved. VR has done a great and respectful job of utilizing us as a sounding board. We need to uphold and expand on that mutual trust.
- We identify issues and opportunities, and relay them to the staff, such as the changing environment in technology and how to market to employers.
- Help the one-stop facilities include and be cognizant of people with disabilities in terms of accessibility AND receiving services. Make sure the Workforce Investment Act partners are aware of our involvement with the Vocational Rehabilitation Council, and they help we can offer. Serve on their Community Management Teams.

In summary, our role and responsibilities as Council members are:

1. As individual members, be publicly supportive of the Program. Do outreach to consumers, help them make connections to services, speak positively, help change stereotypes, and bring feedback about VR services to the staff.
2. Specific activities:
  - a. Report to the Governor;
  - b. Develop the State Plan, help look at long-range needs;
  - c. Review the Consumer Satisfaction Survey;
  - d. Advise the staff on policy regarding ways to improve services using all our backgrounds and expertise.

What are we NOT responsible for? What is outside of our job description?

- We don't have the authority to speak on behalf of the Council, without permission of the Council.
- We are not the managers of the Program. For instance, we don't hire and fire counselors.
- We are not the counselors.
- We are not the money managers.
- We are allies and supportive of the counselors, and they trust us.

## **Our Committee's plans: What do you want to do over the next few years?**

### **1. Native American Committee Ideas for the next few years**

Members: Ron, David, Michelle and Jackie

David is the chair.

- A. Continue to support the 121s. Keep communication with them open. Avoid confusion; help make it more clear.
- B. Hold one of our meetings on a Reservation, such as Fort Belknap, to coincide with Milk River Days, on July 26-30. Provide the staff and Council with cultural training, and cultural immersion on Thursday night.
- C. Work with the Crow Agency to encourage their adoption of 121.
- D. Some Tribal clients fall through the cracks. Monitor the 121s to insure services are being carried out with quality.
- E. Address the gap experienced by non-Tribal members who live on the Reservation. They currently do not qualify for 121 services.
- F. Help the VR staff understand the needs and issues of Native Americans. Encourage them to learn about them to better serve them.

### **Short term Native American Committee priorities:**

1. Hold the summer Council meeting in Fort Belknap in conjunction with the Milk River Days, July 26-28. Do cultural training for the Council and staff, and cultural immersion on the Thursday night of the meeting. Dave will find a speaker.
2. Contact the Crow Agency Rep for 121.
3. Invite the 121s to the July Council meeting. Have a panel of 121 representative speakers. Focus on the subject of 121 issues.
4. Encourage VR representatives to attend the Consortia of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR).
5. Send a VR representative to the Native American Brain Injury Association Conference.
6. NA Committee meet with the 121 representatives to discuss public awareness and what their needs are.

### **2. Transition Committee ideas for the next few years**

Members: Don, Dick, Faith, Dan M, Dan B, and Sheila

Don is the Chair.

- A. Encourage networks among service providers to best utilize VR.
- B. Get kids in the loop early. Explore getting more funding for more counselors in order to do this.
- C. Regarding higher education, address insuring consistency and standards in place for transition services and expectations from high schools to higher education. Consider eligibility and accommodations.
- D. Kids aren't prepared adequately for their college experiences. Address the huge change they experience in this transition. Educate VR counselors and students on the differences in required services between high school and college, so everyone has the correct information.

- E. Grow our individual understanding. Familiarize ourselves with the components of transition. If there is an area we are interested, let Don or Dick know and they will help arrange it.
- F. Create a website that includes:
  - a. Here are all the relevant links (in one website!) to all the best transition websites.
  - b. Find your VR counselor through the website.
  - c. Identify all the youth who might need VR services. Create, too, a database of all the special education teachers to improve communication between teachers and VR counselors.
- G. Help the Council stay apprised of the Governor's Task Force on Transitions, and support its recommendations to the Governor. Be a good sounding board for them. Participate as much as would be helpful to them.
- H. Create a map of VR transition services across the state and a schedule of the counselors presence in the schools, to help identify what is working and what is not, with the goal to identify best practices. Perhaps discuss this with Bridget.
- I. Ask Bridget to attend all our committee meetings.
- J. Distribute transition brochures at all IEP meetings of all families in all schools. There was an effort to name the counselor for each high school but the brochures didn't get distributed. Or provide the VR counselors with brochures and help them be aware of the web page.

### **Short term Transition Committee priorities:**

This coming year:

1. Opportunity to review the Task Force's work.
2. Keep up to date on the higher education work that Ellen is doing regarding transfer of credits.
3. Seek an interagency agreement between VR, the Office of Public Instruction, and the Department of Public Health and Human Services to cooperate and best serve folks with disabilities. Ask Joe to help us be aware and see if we can help.
4. Do a summary of performance / IDEA. Identify what it is and what we want it to be . Study the Summary of Performance.
5. Ask a staff person discuss with us what is transition – other than school to work. Tell us more about adult training services.

### **3. Public Awareness and Legislative Education Committee ideas for the next few years**

Members: Ruth, Jim, Claudette, Paul, Denise and Carol

Ruth is the Chair.

- A. Market people with disabilities to employers.
- B. Develop a few people to be really familiar with the Executive Planning Process (EPP budget process) who are willing to meet with legislators and testify at hearings.
- C. Promote the image of consumers.
- D. Promote the image of the VR agency.
- E. Promote overall the independence of people living with disabilities.
- F. Grow the public awareness of VR services in general.

### **Short term Public Awareness and Legislative Education priorities**

- 1. Initiate a wider distribution of brochures to counselors, medical offices, mental health facilities, physical therapy offices, and social security offices. Follow-up to replenish their supplies.
- 2. Provide an advertisement, column or article in the Montana Brain Injury Association literature.
- 3. Explore agencies that do not have literature and offer consultation with VR staff to medical providers and to display brochures.
- 4. Train our committee members for meeting with legislators, how to testify at hearings, and about the Executive Planning Process.
- 5. Promote VR through a TV segment and radio talk show appearances. Topic: transportation.
- 6. Discuss VR services with at least one person outside of VR each quarter.
- 7. Continue Report to the Governor, and Stats at a Glance.
- 8. Mail VR information and literature to VR "Friends of Rehab" at least 3 times in 2006.
- 9. Develop a talking point paper to focus the discussion on important VR issues.
- 10. Establish a relationship with local legislative representatives.
- 11. Attack the problem of stereotyping. Watch the video and decide what to do with it, and how we could best utilize it.

### **Next steps in our planning process**

- 1. Name goals, and the baby steps to reach them.
- 2. Develop strategies to get to our goals.
- 3. Delegate and decide who does what.
- 4. Continue good communication between policy makers, Council and staff.
- 5. Make sure any activities / chores we make are in full accordance with our mission and vision.
- 6. Our meeting agendas reflect our mission, vision, and goals so we don't lose sight of these ideas.

## Meeting evaluations summary

11/15/2005 Planning meeting

1. What was the *most* productive or helpful or interesting parts of the meeting?
  - Our mission statement. Our Council member roles.
  - The binder, small groups, and brainstorming.
  - Movie with power point slides and staff's editorials about current issues in Vocational Rehabilitation. People on the Council are so friendly and intelligent; it was an energizing experience.
  - Meeting and talking with other Board members. General orientation of VR programs.
  - Breaking into small groups mixing experienced with new people.
  - Open discussion on our goals.
  - Facilitator wrote summary on big paper. Lunch was really good too. Beki – good facilitator.
  - Established understanding of goals, roles and activities.
  - Sharing of ideas.
  - Writing down all our activities on big paper and putting on the wall for all to see.
  - Learning the specifics of VR and the willingness of VR counselors to work as a team for employment.
2. What were the *least* productive or helpful or interesting parts of the meeting?
  - None.
  - Not sure there was any least productive parts.
  - ?
  - None.
  - Too many bonding experiences. Need some, but fewer.
  - When we got together in the committee groups, there was so much talking about goals without a comprehensive plan to reach them. I guess it was a lot of work without promise of results yet.
  - Too much in too little time.
  - I don't know that there was a least.
3. Did you *accomplish* what you wanted to accomplish? If so, what subjects or issues or topics were they?
  - Yes.
  - Yes, being on Native Committee.
  - I want to see where and how we will start bringing the resources to VR to reach the goals we are advising them.
  - Yes. Education on VR system. Understanding Council versus staff roles.
  - Yes, schedule and goals.
  - Yes, ten times over.
  - Yes, established understanding of goals, roles and activity.
  - Yes, committee topics.
  - Yes, set goals for 2006.
  - Had no expectations

4. What *changes and improvements* would suggest for our future meetings?
- ?
  - Do Council at one meeting, committees at another. Parts of two days instead of all at once!
  - Room with windows and a couple of additional breaks. Monday afternoon did not include a break. Should have been discussion regarding where Tribal meeting would be held. Fort Belknap was chosen without discussion.
  - E-mail minutes from last meeting to each members so we can remember and continue to think about issues talked about in the Council meeting.
  - More time.
  - None.
  - Nothing
5. What would you like to have left *exactly as it was today*? Keep these characteristics:
- Keeping pattern of room as is.
  - Continue to have Beki as the presenter; she's so good at facilitating the meeting!
  - Tuesday facilitation was most beneficial.
  - Continue using flip charts for notes.
  - Wingate Hotel was awesome. Would like to stay there again.
  - The big paper format is very good.
  - Since I am new, have no idea
6. Any *other* feedback, comments or suggestions you would care to make?
- Great energy. Great food! You made it fun.
  - Applies to all VR meetings: Better sound system for FM system for Faith.
  - Peggy set up the meeting and information materials so well. The meeting was organized, content rich, and overall a good experience.
  - Thank you for trusting us.
  - Beki, I think you do a great job. I don't think you need to change anything.
  - Beki was a wonderful facilitator!
  - I liked the opportunity to learn what the Council is all about.